

# UNCLE SAM PATROLLING THE MEXICAN BOUNDARY

**Guard Water Holes. Keep Out Stragglers—Mexican Labor Invading Texas—Man Killed for His Hat. Fortunes in Onions—Uncle Sam's New Winter Garden on the Lower Rio Grande.**

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LAREDO, Texas.

This is the first of a series of letters which I shall write about our sister country of Mexico. I have come to the boundary by the way of St. Louis and San Antonio, and am now here at Laredo, on the southern edge of Uncle Sam's land. I had this afternoon the peculiar experience of standing astride the two greatest of the North American republics. I was in the center of the old wagon bridge which here crosses the Rio Grande, and I had my left foot and hand in the United States, while my right foot was in Mexico. I know this was the fact, for behind me was one of the boundary posts which mark the outline between the two countries. This was a steel pyramid about a foot square at the bottom and six feet in height. It was plated with silver, and each side of it bore an inscription showing that it marked the boundary line. The carving on the side facing our country was in English and that on the opposite side in Spanish, but both mean the same. The English inscription reads:

"Boundary of the United States. Treaty of 1848. Re-established by treaties of 1884-1889."

Under these words is the following: "Destruction or displacement of this monument is a misdemeanor, punishable by the United States or by Mexico."

The United States side of the pyramid is marked with the American eagle and on the Mexican side is the coat of arms of Mexico. As I stood facing the west, with my right leg in the United States and my left leg in Mexico, I observed the left perceptibly trembled. Perhaps it was for fear of the revolution, which has been so long going on on the southern side of the bridge.

## Our Boundary With Mexico.

I turned around and looked to the west, my eye following the course of the Rio Grande as far as sight could reach. It is a ragged, muddy, dreary stream, with banks which are ragged and low, and bordered by vegetation as coarse and thirsty as that of the Jordan. The stream is not navigable, and its chief business seems to be to mark the boundaries between the two countries and to give a dreary and dangerous task to some thousands of the United States soldiers.

The Rio Grande is winding. From here to the Gulf of Mexico, its course on the map looks like the teeth of a saw, and running northwest to El Paso it curves in and out and makes great bends covering almost double the lineal distance between those two points. At El Paso the river leaves Mexico and runs north into the United States, and our boundary from there to the Pacific is otherwise marked. The whole length of the boundary, with its many curves, roughly speaking, is quite as long as from New York to Salt Lake City, and this whole line, running through the most desert regions of the United States, is now patrolled by our troops.

## Guarding the Rio Grande.

On my way here I stopped at San Antonio and had a talk with the officers in charge of the post there. They tell me that the river is especially difficult to guard. It flows through a desert, and when its waters are low it can be easily forded. All along it the Mexican rebels have been trying to smuggle in arms and ammunition. Boxes and crates, labeled agricultural machinery, filled with guns are dumped off at some way station along the railway, and the Mexican raiders steal over and try to bring them across. The railways in most cases are quite a distance north of the boundary and the troops have to watch the trails and water holes to catch the brigands.

In addition to this there are many ranches not far from the river, to which the Mexicans will come to steal horses, cattle and food, and a continual outlook has to be kept for hundreds and thousands of miles. This is done with a small force. One man will patrol a line thirty or forty miles long, and there are detachments of troops at every eighty or one hundred miles.

The men live in little tents out in the desert, and one of the great troubles is to get supplies to them. Many of the camps are from fifty to one hundred miles from the railroad, and it takes a wagon or pack train from ten days to three weeks to make the round trip. There is practically no food in the country, and the men have to live on dried meats, canned stuff and hardtacks. They boil and filter the water of the country, and all are inoculated for typhoid fever before starting. The country is so arid that the only trails can be from

water hole to water hole, and much of the work is watching these water holes.

## Keeping Out the Smugglers.

Another job which Uncle Sam has all along this boundary is the prevention of smuggling, and also the keeping out of the Chinese, Hindoos and others who are trying to sneak across into the United States contrary to our exclusion laws. Within the last two or three years many Chinese have been smuggled across, at the rate of \$500 per man, this being the price paid by each Celestial for his successful landing. It is different now. The government has a band of mounted scouts, who are under the Department of Commerce and Labor, and whose only business is to run down and capture such characters. One of these men, Tom Gurley, has taken sixty-four Chinamen within less than a year, and in addition has captured a large number of smugglers. The Chinese are still attempting to cross over, and they are now offering as much as a thousand dollars apiece for a successful landing.

Right here at Laredo I met a large party of Hindoos who were trying to get into our country. They were on the southern side of the bridge, in the plaza which forms the center of the Mexican town of Nuevo Laredo. They were tall, dark-faced, strong, husky East Indians, and the chief was a turbaned Hindoo from the Punjab.

I asked him where they were going, and he told me he had brought the gang of forty-three with him from the Panama canal. They had traveled first to Guatemala, and had come by the Pan-American railway from there into Mexico. They had gone clear across that country to Laredo, and are now hoping to go through Texas to California to find work on the farms and railroads there. The chief complained to me that the authorities at Washington had kept his party waiting for two weeks at Nuevo Laredo, and that he could not learn when they were likely to leave. I photographed four of these Hindoos. They were fine-looking fellows, all wearing turbans and Indian dress, and it seemed to me as though they might have been lifted up bodily out of the streets of Delhi and dropped down into this Mexican town.

## The Only Gateway to Mexico.

During a part of the past year this crossing of the Rio Grande at Laredo has been the only gateway to Mexico. Vera Cruz was closed by the revolution of Diaz, and El Paso had a long period of interrupted traffic on account of the rebels of Chihuahua and other parts of northern Mexico. The bridge at this point, over which the railroad trains went, has been poorly guarded, and I am told that the rebels with a few sticks of dynamite might have blown it to pieces. Uncle Sam has a fort here under the command of Colonel Brewer. The force consists of about 600 cavalry, who have recently come from the Philippines. They are husky, fine-looking fellows, and are ready to move at a moment's notice. In case of trouble their first work would be to seize and guard the railway bridge.

I am surprised at the Mexicans I find down here on the United States side of the boundary. The trains coming in are packed with peons or Indians, who are coming into Texas to work on the farms. I am told that something like 48,000 came into the United States last summer and fall to aid in harvesting the cotton and other crops. Thirty thousand came by way of Laredo, and more than 18,000 by way of Brownsville. These men were scattered all over Texas, and they got good wages during the harvesting season. Many of them have returned home loaded with money. The current wages for farm work in Mexico are something like 25 cents gold a day, but here in Texas the price for picking cotton is from 50 cents upward per hundred pounds. Many a man can pick two, three or four hundred pounds in a day, and these Mexicans, with their families, often make from three to six dollars a day, and some even more. They spend almost nothing, and as a result are able to go back home with enough money to keep them for the rest of the year. The Texans are glad to have them, and I am told that there they are employed by the hundreds on certain estates.

In addition to this there are many Mexicans who have come over to act as servants in the towns of southern Texas. I heard of one who, with his family, was so employed in Brownsville. His wages were about \$15 gold a month, and he had served the family at these wages for two years or more. Last summer he asked his employer if he might have a vacation to pick cotton, and this being granted, he left. He took his family with him, and when he came back at the

end of three months he showed savings of \$350. He then took up his old job at \$75 a month and will work at that until the next cotton-picking season. He spent his money to buy a lot at Brownsville, and his next year's savings will build him a house.

## A Walk Into Mexico.

It cost me just one nickel to get into the Mexican republic. This was the toll over the wagon bridge which crosses the Rio Grande into Nuevo Laredo. I was stopped on the Mexican side by three officials and asked if I had any guns or other ammunition, and in returning one of our customs officers asked me if I had any dutiable goods in my clothes.

The difference in the prosperity of the two republics was apparent as soon as I left the bridge. The first man I met was a blind beggar who asked me for alms, and I met more poor people as I came up into the town and went through the narrow, unpaved streets. Laredo, Texas, is a city of the rich. Many of its people have money to burn, and they are raising gold dollars on the lands which lie all around them. The people of Nuevo Laredo seem to be just the reverse, although they are surrounded by a country equally good. The town is gone to seed, and its houses of brick, covered with stucco and painted all the colors of the rainbow, are battered and worn. The only sign of active life was in the plaza, where a gaily uniformed band was playing excellent music. I saw soldiers here and there, and now and then passed one of the federal infantry patrolling the streets.

## Killed for His Hat.

I understand that there is need of the federal and local police just now almost everywhere. The unsettled conditions as regards the government have made the thieves and other criminals more courageous than they have been in the past. Bribe-taking is common in many districts, and travel in the mountains is almost everywhere unsafe. There are many thefts, and crime, which could be kept in check when the country was quiet, now goes on unpunished.

As an instance of this, the other night a rich Mexican, the owner of a large hacienda, was standing on the steps of a Pullman car. He was something of a dandy, and wore a beautiful sombrero, embroidered with silver and loaded with a heavy silver cord. Such a hat is worth \$25 or more. The train had stopped at a wayside station, and the man was standing looking out toward the east, smoking a cigarette. It was evening, and the electric lights on the car made bright the silver trimmings of the sombrero. They caught the eye of a peon, who was sneaking up on the westward side of the train, and he, climbing the steps, stabbed the man in the back, snatched the sombrero and got away before he could be apprehended. The American who saw this tells me the stabbed man died.

I have been warned by several travelers to keep the curtains of my berth down when riding at night over the Mexican railroads, and when I asked why, the reply was that several rocks had been thrown into the cars aimed at travelers who sat by the windows. One such traveler was sleeping. The stone scattered the pieces of glass all over him, and cut a gash or so in his face. His eyes were saved by the fact that he was sleeping when the stone came.

I would say, however, that these cases are extraordinary. Railroad travel in Mexico is undoubtedly more dangerous just now than in the past, and hold-ups in certain districts are common. I understand, however, that many of the roads have been running their trains uninterruptedly during the past year, and I hope to travel over the greater part of the Mexican republic without being robbed. I shall start south to Monterey tomorrow, and will write of conditions and other things as I find them.

## Fortunes in Onions.

Before leaving Uncle Sam's country, however, I want to give you some of the big stories the Texans are pouring into my ears. They say their State is growing faster than the gourd of old Jonah. Right here in Laredo they have proved to my satisfaction that they are making fortunes in onions. Five years ago the land surrounding the town was practically a desert, and it could be bought for from \$1.50 to \$3 per acre. Now you have to cover it with greenbacks to get it. There are already more than ten thousand acres under cultivation, and much of this is in garden patches, devoted to onions which in quality surpass those of Bermuda. The Laredo onion is as white as snow and exceedingly tender. It is often as big as the head of a baby. Last year 2,800 carloads were shipped away from Laredo, and this represented a value of between two and three million dollars. These onions go to our northern markets.

A year or so ago one of the big onion raisers decided to experiment with red pepper. The result was much the same as that expressed in the story of the rather profane grocer, who became converted and was praying at a religious meeting for a poor widow. He said, "Oh, Lord, give this poor woman a barrel of flour! Oh, Lord, give her a barrel of potatoes! Oh, Lord, give her a barrel of sugar! Oh, Lord, give her a barrel of pepper!" At which point he caught a

self and said, "No, d—n it, that's too much pepper."

Well, this Laredo farmer had too much pepper. The crop was so large he could not dispose of it all. He swamped the drug houses, the canneries and the pickle makers, and still had bales upon bales of pepper left. The pepper was analyzed, and it proved to be the richest pepper of the world.

## Uncle Sam's Winter Garden.

An even greater revolution as to the values of land has taken place in the lower Rio Grande valley in the neighborhood of Brownsville. There are three counties between this point and there that were practically dead ten years ago, but which are now shipping solid trainloads of winter vegetables to St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago, New York and Philadelphia. They can raise vegetables for these markets three weeks ahead of California, and they begin sending them off when the blizzard is still raging north of Mason and Dixon's line. In consequence, four thriving cities have grown up within the last four years. These are San Benito, Harlingen, Mercedes and Mission. They have each three or four thousand people and each is surrounded by a rich farming community.

I hear many stories about men who have come to this valley walking on their uppers and are now riding about in automobiles. The exports of vegetables are running high into the millions of dollars a year, and over \$125,000,000 of new money has been invested in the valley within the past seven years.

Mr. Holland, one of the owners of the San Antonio Express, tells me that all the counties of the lower Rio Grande valley are rapidly growing, and he cites the instances of three which cover a space about as large as that of Rhode Island. In 1910 the population of these counties had doubled over that of 1900; and they have grown about 25 per cent within the past two years. The land values have also more than doubled, and I am told that the country is still on the edge of its beginning.

I understand that homeseekers' excursions are now run throughout the year, and that great irrigation works are under way. In some places the water is pumped from the Rio Grande by centrifugal pumps with pipes ranging from sixteen to forty-eight inches, and the water is carried by means of pumping stations for miles over the country.

There is another district between here and San Antonio where the irrigation is by artesian wells. They find the water at from 750 to 1,800 feet and some of the wells flow sufficient to irrigate from 200 to 320 acres. Indeed, the whole of Texas seems to be in an excellent business condition. The farmers are growing rich and the cities are rapidly increasing in size.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

## RAISE HOGS, CATTLE AND FORAGE CROPS

This the Advice of Secretary Wilson, of Department of Agriculture, to Corn Exposition Audience.

Columbia, S. C., Feb. 1.—Recommendation that farmers of the South devote more attention to the raising of hogs and cattle and the growing of forage crops was made here today by James Wilson, United States secretary of agriculture, in addressing visitors to the National Corn Exposition.

"Don't sell your corn; feed it to stock," was reiterated by the secretary many times in his address. He asserted that if southern farmers would follow that advice they would bring their soil to a high state of fertility and could maintain its fertility with a minimum use of commercial fertilizer.

In addition to Secretary Wilson, addresses were made at the exposition today by John Lamb, of Virginia, chairman of the House committee on agriculture, United States Senator E. D. Smith, of South Carolina, and Harry P. Wood, of Chicago.

The secretary and the members of the House committee on agriculture this afternoon also attended a banquet in honor of more than eight hundred boys who have won honors in the growing of corn in the various states and eighty-five girls who have won recognition in the growing of tomatoes. At the banquet the bust of the late Dr. Leaman A. Knapp, known for his work in the improvement of agriculture, was presented to the State of Alabama for making the best showing in the school for prize winners which has been conducted in connection with the exposition.

Tonight the Columbia chamber of commerce entertained the visiting members of the agricultural committee and other prominent visitors with a banquet. Secretary Wilson also attended a luncheon given by the girls of Winthrop college here this afternoon.

Today was officially known as "Boys' Day" at the exposition.

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